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SUBJECT: PEACE LABS: THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE,
PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

1. (U) The European Commission (EC), along with the GOC Accion Social's Peace and Development Program (PDP), helped found and support three "Peace Laboratories" in six different regions. The "Peace Laboratories" focus on three key areas: supporting human rights and local peace initiatives, strengthening local institutions, and promoting sustainable development. Total funding for the Peace Laboratories from 2002-present is 113.8 million Euros (approximately \$145 million dollars), with 81% from the EU and 19% from the GOC. Implementation challenges include disconnects between local communities and GOC objectives, lack of security in conflict areas, and weak coordination between the Peace Laboratories and other GOC initiatives. We have not provided any funding to the Peace Laboratories, but coordinate our activities in specific regions such as Medio Magdalena. End Summary.

Origins of Peace Laboratories

2. (U) In 1995, ECOPETROL, the Petroleum Workers Union (USO), the Economic Society of Friends of the Country (SEAP), the Jesuit Center for Investigation and Education (CINEP) and the Catholic church set up the first "Peace Laboratory" in the Medio Magdalena region in response to the widespread violence that had plagued the area since the 1980s. Peace Laboratory I was established to address the lack of state presence, protect human rights, broaden political space, and promote social and development programs. Ana-Maria Mojica, European Commission Coordinator for the Peace Laboratories Program, told us the basic purpose was to help the local communities survive in the face of FARC, ELN and paramilitary disputes over control of territory and coca production. Peace Laboratory I covers 30 municipalities in four departments--Cesar, Santander, Bolivar and Antioquia.

3. (U) Since the creation of the initial Peace Laboratory, the European Commission (EC) has started three new phases of "Peace Laboratories" in six different regions. Peace Laboratory I (est. 2002) is a continuation of the initial Peace Laboratory in the Medio Magdalena. Peace Laboratory II (est. 2004) operates in eastern Antioquia, Cauca/Narino border, and Norte de Santander. Peace Laboratory III (est. 2006) operates in Meta and Montes de Maria. Project

oversight falls mainly to the Peace and Development Program (PDP) of Accion Social and the European Commission.

Peace Laboratories Focus, Themes and Regions

¶4. (U) The Peace Laboratories focus on three key areas: 1) supporting human rights and peace initiatives, 2) strengthening social services and institutions, and 3) promoting sustainable development. They work with local institutions, specifically with PDP subsidiaries in each region, as well as the church. In addition to the three priority areas, Peace Laboratory III also aims to support vulnerable groups, especially those disproportionately affected by the conflict such as indigenous, Afro-colombians, women, and youth. Politically, Peace Laboratories III funds local and regional initiatives to enhance civil society participation in peace and development processes. Working through implementing agents in each region--CORDEPAZ in Meta and Fundacion Red Desarrollo y Paz de los Montes de Maria--they also hold monthly meetings with civil society, the GOC and local governments, and non-governmental groups.

Peace Laboratory Achievements

¶5. (U) Each of the three Peace Laboratories is at different stages of implementation. Peace Laboratory I is in the final stages of handing over its programs to local implementers. Peace Laboratory I has helped create eight humanitarian spaces--staffed with local human rights ombudsman--in the 30

municipalities of Medio Magdalena. The ombudsmen have attended to 1188 human rights petitions. Peace Laboratory I also reports that it has helped 43,557 families in the region, planted 9085 hectares of land with alternative crops such as cacao, palma, cafe, fruits, and beans, created 4623 new jobs, and provided microcredit to 1292 families. It has also helped title 791 plots of land and is in the process of titling 4623 additional plots. Through other small projects, Peace Laboratory I has also supported 119 community groups, provided infrastructure grants to 23 schools, and improved 100 kilometers of roads. Peace Laboratory II reports similar results; Peace Laboratory III is only now awarding contracts for its projects.

Funding Sources

¶6. (U) The majority of funding for the Peace Laboratories has come from the European Commission, but the GOC also provides funding via a World Bank loan. To date, Mojica said, the Peace Laboratories projects have received and obligated 113.8 million Euros (\$145 million dollars), with the EC providing 92 million Euros (\$117 million dollars) and the GOC/World Bank providing 21.8 million Euros (\$28 million dollars). Peace Laboratory I received 42.22 million Euros (\$54 million dollars) of funding, and Peace Laboratory II has received 41.4 million Euros (\$53 million dollars). Peace Laboratory III began in 2006 with a handful of pilot programs, and is now selecting additional projects worth 30.2 million Euros (\$38.5 million dollars). The Laboratories received 26 million Euros (\$33 million dollars) this year from the EC to continue the project and hopes to be awarded another 40 million Euros (\$51 million dollars) over the next two years.

¶7. (U) These funds support individual projects and administrative costs. Eighty percent of program funds have gone to sustainable development programs, with the remaining 20 percent split between human rights/peace initiatives and governance/institution building. UNDP also funded thematic advisors for Montes de Maria, while ECOPETROL funds an anti-youth recruitment program in conjunction with Peace Laboratory III in Meta.

Obstacles to Implementation

¶18. (SBU) European Commission Director of Peace Laboratory III Johny Ariza told us the programs face implementation challenges in all regions, with conflicts between local, regional, and national priorities a constant issue. Civil society and local government leaders often push for sustainable development projects and programs focused on the resolution of past conflicts. These projects frequently clash with national policies. Ariza told us that some of the most problematic disconnects are with the Ministries of Agriculture, Interior, and Mines over resource allocation and program prioritization. The Agricultural Ministry frequently favors large, corporate investments over projects to assist peasant farmers. Ariza said that since the Peace Laboratories are not part of a national strategy, it is difficult for Accion Social or the EC to exert much influence over the ministries.

¶19. (SBU) Security also remains an ongoing concern in the six regions where the Peace Laboratories operate. Libarado Valderrama, Director of Peace Laboratory I in Medio Magdalena, told us security remains a major problem in some areas, especially in southern Bolivar and Cesar Departments. In early 2008, a USAID Colombian contractor working on alternative development programs was killed by members of a criminal group in southern Bolivar. Similar security challenges have hampered implementation in other regions, with threats coming mainly from the FARC and criminal groups.

Coordination a Problem

¶10. (SBU) There is little cooperation between the Peace Laboratories and other Accion Social programs, such as the Center for Coordinated and Integrated Action (CCAI),

explained Everardo Murillo Sanchez, Director of the Peace and Development Program (PDP) of Accion Social. The Peace Laboratories and CCAI work in some of the same areas, but CCAI takes a top-down approach, while PDP is bottom-up. The programs also have different mandates, with CCAI focused on establishing a state presence in conflictive areas, and PDP centered on development, human rights and reconciliation. Murillo said that due to the "militarization" of CCAI programs, he wants to keep a distance from the program. He also rejected making coca eradication a requirement for participation in Peace Laboratory activities as it is done in other Accion Social programs, and sharply criticized USG and GOC coca spray programs.

¶11. (U) Still, the Peace Laboratories have attempted limited, informal coordination with Accion Social and the USG in specific areas. In Meta and Montes de Maria, CCAI and the Peace Laboratories are attempting some informal coordination.

Murillo said Father Rafael Castillo in Montes de Maria works closely with CCAI to help focus their programs. Alvaro Balcazas, the civilian director of CCAI's main effort consolidation effort in Meta, told us he has met with the PDP coordinators for Meta to learn about each other's programs. The USG has not provided funding directly to the Peace Laboratories, but USAID is working to coordinate alternative development programs in the six regions, including the Medio Magdalena. GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo, told us that there is discussion within the GOC about consolidating the different consolidation, peace, development, and reconciliation programs into a cohesive national strategy, but that this remains in the early stages.

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